

Peel enters new funding arrangement with Habitat for Humanity

By Bill Rea

Habitat for Humanity is helping to change a lot of lives, and Peel Region is doing its bit to help out.

Regional Council last month agreed to enter into a funding agreement with the chapters of the agency serving the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), as well as Halton and Mississauga.

This came after councillors received a presentation from Daniel Ger, vice-president of land for the GTA chapter of Habitat for Humanity.

Habitat for Humanity is an international, non-profit organization whose mission is to mobilize volunteers and community partners in the building of safe, decent, affordable housing and to promote homeownership as a means of breaking the cycle of poverty.

Regional staff stated in a report that went to Council.

Ger opened by thanking the Region for its funding support over the last several years, which has enabled them to build homes in 12 municipalities across the GTA.

Ger added the Region has provided \$4.23 million since 2012. This money has supported the development of 44 affordable housing units in four developments, as well as three units in cooperation with Daniels FirstHome.

Just two days before the presentation, four families were handed the keys to their new homes in Southfields Village, and six more units in that neighbourhood should be occupied some time this year.

It was a great day this week, Councillor Johanna Downey remarked, as she praised the work of Regional staff to help bring it about. Huge impact in our community.

Ger pointed out that for a lot of these families, the idea of home ownership had been a distant dream.

He also observed that the stability of a home has benefitted entire families, commenting the daughter of one family in a Habitat for Humanity development in Peel was valedictorian of her elementary school graduating class, and came in first in the school's science fair. Her parents believe a main reason for that success was she had a good and safe home with space for her to concentrate on her studies.

It really speaks to the importance of having a safe and decent place to live, Ger remarked.

Mayor Allan Thompson pointed out the Region is able to assist through grant funding. He added the developments in Southfields point to the need to do more.

He wondered if there's a way for the Region to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the agency, rather than have representatives continually going back to the Region seeking grants.

Regional CAO David Szwarc said staff have been working on that, with an aim of coming up with a long-term funding arrangement.

Thompson also pointed to the need to partner with the lower-tier municipalities, since the necessary permits are paid at that level.

Mississauga Councillor Nando Iannicca commented it's the federal and provincial levels that have the resources to do the bulk of the work when it comes to affordable housing, but it's the local levels that Habitat have to partner with.

Brampton Councillor Grant Gibson observed his ward was the first in the city to have a Habitat development. He recalled there were concerns at first as to whether it would work, but he said the community came together.

The staff report, which was approved by council, stated there had been a funding agreement that was due to expire at the end of 2017.

It added the new funding agreement for 2018 will provide \$90,000 per unit up to \$990,000, which will assist in the development of 11 units. This money can be used by the agency for purchase or sale of land, construction, labour and material, and other costs directly related to the project.